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SUBJECT: FOOD SECURITY DEMARCHE DELIVERED:
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE SUPPORTS USG
INITIATIVE, LOOKS TO INCREASE COOPERATION

REF: STATE 58996

¶1. (U) Summary: Economic Counselor delivered reftel points to Minister of Agriculture Norbert Bashengezi Katitima, highlighting USG initiatives and commitment to achieve global food security. Minister Bashengezi expressed strong support for USG efforts and voiced his appreciation for existing USAID programs in the DRC to enhance agricultural production and marketing. Bashengezi outlined the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (GDRC)'s agricultural policy, highlighting the need for greater mechanization, modernization, and commercialization of agricultural production. Potential areas for increased cooperation in the DRC's agricultural sector, including promotion of U.S. commercial engagement, were also discussed. End summary.

¶2. (U) In discussing food security, Bashengezi underscored the importance of the DRC's agricultural sector for the country's development and stability. Noting the DRC's significant, but currently largely non-commercialized, agricultural potential, Bashengezi presented a list of urgent needs to increase the DRC's agriculture production. Specific needs include seeds (specifically, for cereals); agricultural equipment and machinery such as hoes and irrigation equipment; technical assistance to support increased mechanization of agricultural production; increased training for DRC agricultural producers; technical assistance for veterinary clinics and pharmaceutical products for livestock; and enhanced cold storage facilities to promote aquaculture. Bashengezi also stressed the key role that rehabilitation of roads and improved use of river transport would play in developing agricultural markets throughout the country.

¶3. (U) Bashengezi noted that the GDRC has already launched an initiative aimed at modernizing agricultural production through the acquisition of John Deer tractors. Specifically, the GDRC acquired 500 tractors in 2009; the GDRC plans to buy 700 more tractors in 2011 and 1,000 tractors in 2011. Moreover, as an incentive to boost the modernization of the DRC's agricultural sector, the GDRC has allowed a fiscal exoneration thru March 12, 2010 of key inputs in the aquaculture, agricultural and livestock sectors.

¶4. (U) Minister Bashengezi spoke favorably of USG engagement in the DRC's agricultural sector, including USAID's current programs to improve agricultural productivity and strengthen agricultural markets. On a personal level, he noted his positive view from his youth of Peace Corps fish farming activities in his home village in South Kivu. The model used by Peace Corps had greatly influenced his policies for agriculture development, with an emphasis on "practical" projects.

¶5. (U) Comment: Minister Bashengezi clearly understands both the potential and the challenges for increased agricultural production in the DRC and is open to increased engagement with the USG on these issues. Lack of infrastructure, undeveloped market structures, degraded productive land and inputs, and limited commercialization

and mechanization in the agricultural sector all constrain increased production and, as a result, food security. USAID works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture through its successful agricultural production and marketing programs. The DRC's agricultural sector also presents numerous opportunities for U.S. commercial engagement, including exports of U.S. agricultural equipment and machinery. Minister Bashengezi's strong interest in attracting U.S. companies to the DRC to explore commercial opportunities is encouraging. Post believes that a reverse visit program led by Minister Bashengezi, such as those funded by USTDA, would be an excellent opportunity to support the GDRC's efforts to enhance agricultural productivity and food security while at the same time exploring opportunities for U.S. exports in the agricultural sector. End comment.

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